



## Graduation Advice for the Ages

By U.S. Sen. John Cornyn

At ceremonies across Texas this month, high schools, colleges and universities are holding their commencement exercises. Thousands of proud young citizens are being recognized for their accomplishments and moved forward to the next challenges of their lives.

I had the honor of delivering three commencement speeches on May 13: at Texas State University in San Marcos, at Concordia University in Austin and at the Texas Tech University School of Law in Lubbock.

I told the Concordia graduates I was aware that I was the only thing standing between them and their diplomas at that moment. They laughed politely. But I also assured them it was truly inspiring to be present as a new generation of Texans enters the 'real world,' where they will shape the future for us all.

In my remarks to these graduates, I spoke of goals and dreams, of government and good citizenship, and of patriotism and public service. As I look back on that day of commencement, I realize that the most important advice for our state's graduates is this: work hard and achieve much, but remember to believe in something greater than yourselves.

Former Texas Chief Justice Jack Pope, a close friend and mentor, gave timeless advice when he spoke at a commencement more than a half-century ago:

"Styles in graduation talks, much like styles in fashion, change with the times, but the message remains constant: You . . . are on the threshold of life's journey. But what will be the object of your trip?."

"Will it be your goal to obtain all the money in the world? If it is, understand it is unlikely that you will ever attain that goal. Will it be your goal to attain lasting fame? If it is, understand that will last for a time, but not forever. Will it be your goal to serve society? That will be the only goal that endures."

I couldn't agree more. We're living in a time of unprecedented prosperity, offering virtually unlimited opportunity. But not everyone shares in that prosperity – sometimes through no fault of their own.

We are incredibly blessed, at this time in history, to be living in Texas and in the United States of America. We are the envy of the world. A major reason is the generous, giving nature of our people, and the liberties we all enjoy.

Our graduates have enormous power to affect the futures of the communities, states and the great nation in which they live. That's because free people, working in their communities and motivated by high ideals, can accomplish more than any government program, more than any grant money, more than any bureaucrat. They can change this world.

Consider the life of one man in Austin, homeless earlier in his life, who joined with five other parishioners of Saint John Neumann Catholic Church eight years ago to start "Mobile Loaves and Fishes." At first, the six simply delivered sack lunches from their cars to the indigent in Austin. As more volunteers appeared, the efforts expanded.

Then trucks were donated, and churches in Austin and San Antonio joined up. The founders' spirit has rippled through these communities, and has extended all the way to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. The organization now has seven trucks and – more importantly – some 6,000 volunteers.

Nothing matches the power of individuals helping others in an hour of need. There are thousands of Texans who work daily - without fanfare - to help their fellow man. They can provide what government cannot – the warmth of a handshake, the empathy of a heart.

My hope for all our Texas graduates is that during their time in school they've developed not only the ability to achieve their personal dreams, but also the desire to serve others.

Winston Churchill once wrote: "We make a living by what we get, we make a life by what we give." And so I left these bright graduates with a challenge: use your God-given talent to lift someone else up, to set an example for those who will follow – to leave this earth even better than you found it. I am confident these bright Texans will meet the challenge.

*Sen. Cornyn is a member of the following Senate Committees: Armed Services, Judiciary, Budget, Small Business and Entrepreneurship, and Joint Economic. He is also the chairman of the subcommittees on Immigration, Border Security and Citizenship and Emerging Threats and Capabilities. He served previously as Texas Attorney General, Texas Supreme Court Justice and Bexar County District Judge.*